

CHAPTER VIII

COCONUT AND BETELNUT

1. *Theoretical Intermezzo*

We have discussed throughout this work the belief that crises in social relations are resolved by magic. In the last chapter we showed explicitly that this is the view expressed in the Orokaiva folk model of exchange (model 25). There are two implications in this folk model: that magical power (*ivo*) is required to establish social relations and that social relations have the effect of generating *ivo* for those who establish them. The objection that may be advanced against this approach is its subjectivity. One may call it a phenomenological approach, as it is based on *ego's* experience of *alter's* world as transcendent (see Schutz 1967: 312-29). One may also call it the approach of Marcel Mauss (1966), who explained exchange by a magical construction he called *hau*. It may be argued that it has some resemblance with Sartre's philosophy (1960), where the opposition between *ego* and *alter* is transcended by a 'dialectical process' or 'praxis'. Here again no interdependence of *ego* and *alter* is deemed to exist prior to a course of action inaugurated by *ego* and serving to transcend the opposition.

Against all these theories, Lévi-Strauss has argued that exchange is logically prior to giving, receiving and giving in return. In his theory, unconscious mental structures not only determine that man should order his universe by means of systems of binary oppositions, but also that these oppositions should be transcended by syntheses. Exchange, and any form of communication, is a synthesis where things are perceived simultaneously from the viewpoint of self and other and destined by nature to pass from the one to the other. The situation that they *belong to* the one or the other arises out of initial relational characteristics (Lévi-Strauss 1966: xlv). 571
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The evidence quoted for these unconscious mental structures is mainly linguistic: the Papuans and Melanesians have only one word for sale and purchase, lending and borrowing, which shows that contradictions between these terms must be illusory. If we survey the Orokaiva data reported in previous chapters, we notice that in general objects of mediation are similarly 'destined by nature' to pass from one partner to another. Meat, for instance, is magically effective only or predominantly if it is received as a gift. One may say that pigs are a family's gift-children: they are part of the family but it is their destiny to be given away. From birth, they may be said to 'belong' to some exchange partner. In fact, in my whole discussion on mediation, I stressed that the donor must be identified with the object of mediation and that, for the exchange relation to be effective, the recipient should also identify with it. I pointed out A (See Cat. 571, p. 148--Analyst) 431
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177 based, is alien and seems dubious to Orokaiva. The Europeans claim
245 that a plant needs to be looked after even if it contains no spirit;
249 to the Orokaiva this appears absurd.

[824] Some Orokaiva have been employed by Europeans as carpenters;
these men have certain skills upon which a community draws when large
community buildings (for instance, the hospital at Sasembata mission
station) need to be constructed. The trained carpenter leads such
177 enterprises in the role of expert. There was one such man in Sasembata
335 village; he, like most others of his type, learned his skill in
European employment and not in one of the small adult education
ventures which the administration has sponsored from time to time (the
adult education classes at Ilimo camp were probably the first of this
type).

177 For the rest, the skills acquired by Orokaiva over the last 15
871 years are largely concerned not directly with village development but
rather with an increase of understanding of the world outside. While
before the war, only a small minority had school education, the
Anglican Mission spread its operations to several new stations,
including Sasembata, after the war. After the eruption, the scope of
education was again greatly extended and it could be said that the
eruption marked the beginning of universal school education in the
majority of Orokaiva villages. The Sasembata station began to draw
virtually the entire child population of the surrounding villages,
and most students now follow a five or six year course. While this
development had been planned ever since the war, it may be significant
that regular school attendance of all the villages in the district
was experienced for the first time at Ilimo, where a school was
conducted for the whole evacuee child population, and adult classes
as well. It is the objective of present school programmes, as far
as I can see, to make the population literate and the increase of
[212] literacy is a major aspect of acculturation over the period. Literacy
has certainly progressed to a point where letters written in Orokaiva
to any family in Sivepe can be read and understood with the help of
at least a junior member of the family; and can be replied to. While
177 I could see no evidence that people have acquired mathematical knowledge
802 of any sophistication, I was struck by a strong quantitative orientation.
In the Orokaiva language, there are no numerals higher than 2; hence,
it is the invariable practise to use English numerals when speaking
the Orokaiva language. The numerals are, in fact, among the main
[192] English linguistic features that have been borrowed. They are used
with remarkable frequency; the number of coffee trees, the value in
pounds of trade goods included in a bride price, the calculation of
money prices, even the number of brothers or men who together played
some role in a mythological tale (a distinctly contemporary touch,
this)--all these phenomena show that "numbers" have become an integral
part of Orokaiva culture. The Orokaiva use the English word "number"
177 for a variety of quantitative concepts, including price. Finally, one
829 must regard as an aspect of acculturation, the introduction of many